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17 NOV 1988

NOTE TO: Director of Central Intelligence

Attached is the memorandum you requested on the Muslim insurgency in the Philippines. It was drafted by the Office of East Asian Analysis, and briefly summarizes the status of this generations-old insurgency and what steps President Aquino has taken to try to resolve it.

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Richard J. Kerr  
Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachment

*Thanks WDR*

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Central Intelligence Agency  
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

17 NOV 1988

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Deputy Director for Intelligence

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE****Muslims in the Philippines: Autonomy Demands Continue**

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17 November 1988

**Summary**

Philippine Muslims, about 5 percent of the Philippine population, threaten to renew their decades-old insurgency while negotiating with Manila over autonomy for the areas of Mindanao where they live. Although concerns occasionally arise that hostilities between Muslim and government forces are imminent, in our judgment, the Muslims will not mount a sustained assault but rather will continue to use small raids to force progress on autonomy. Up to 40,000 Muslim rebels—some supported by Libya, the PLO, and other Islamic benefactors—are divided among three often fractious groups that have been unable to develop a coherent military or political strategy for dealing with Manila. The Aquino government has capitalized on disunity and tried to keep these groups divided with protracted autonomy negotiations.

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This memorandum was prepared by [ ] Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 10 November 1988 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Islands Branch, Southeast Asia Division, OEA, on [ ]

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**Muslims Demand Autonomy**

The approximately 3 million Philippine Muslims, or Moros, living on southwestern Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago have sought some degree of autonomy from the nation's Christian majority for the past 25 years. Most Moros belong to the Sunni sect and are not motivated by the Middle Eastern brand of radical Shia fundamentalism. Most favor creation of an autonomous region where they can live according to Islamic law, but some are demanding an independent state.

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The 1976 Tripoli Agreement ended 14 years of sporadic but bloody war between the government and as many as 30,000 Moros. Libyan leader Qadhafi, selected by both sides as negotiator, was eventually able to broker a deal between the Marcos government, which wanted to retain the goodwill of the oil-rich Middle Eastern nations and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which for several years had sought the help of Islamic nations to end the fighting. The agreement provides for autonomy in 13 Philippine provinces, even though the Muslims are a majority in only five. The relationship between the autonomous region and the central government was to be settled through further negotiations, however. The MNLF has interpreted the Tripoli Agreement as providing for a state within a state, while Manila has claimed the agreement grants local control only of education, economic development, and the judicial system. Former President Marcos circumvented the agreement by holding fraudulent plebiscites and elections, and co-opting many Moro leaders into his government.

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**The Moro's Two-Pronged Strategy**

The MNLF is using the threat of renewed war and diplomatic pressure from Muslim countries through the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to press the Aquino government on autonomy. MNLF rebels are amply equipped and trained by outside sources, mainly Libya, and could challenge the government for control of Muslim areas. In our judgment, Muslim insurgents could not in the long run defeat the Philippine military, but a protracted challenge would be costly for Manila and seriously weaken the effort against the Communist insurgency.

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**The Muslim Insurgent Factions**

**Moro National Liberation Front**...led by Nur Misuari...probably 25,000 armed guerrillas...supported by Libya, Malaysia, the PLO, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference...the original, largest, and most influential of the Muslim insurgent factions...has advocated separate Muslim state.

**Moro Islamic Liberation Front**...led by Hashim Salamat...probably 10,000 armed guerrillas...supported by Pakistan...second-largest faction, split from MNLF in 1976...supports autonomy instead of a separate Muslim state.

**Moro National Liberation Front-Reformists**...led by Dimas Pundato...probably 2,000 armed guerrillas...supported by Saudi Arabia and the PLO...smallest faction...split from MNLF in 1982...most moderate of the factions and may accept limited autonomy.

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SECRET [REDACTED]

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The MNLF's diplomatic efforts with Muslim countries center on achieving belligerency status and recognition as a provisional government. Most Muslim countries consider the Moro issue an internal affair of the Philippines, but several have indicated they will grant the MNLF belligerent status if there is no progress in autonomy talks. Reporting indicates that by early next year MNLF leader Nur Misuari intends to return to Mindanao from self-exile in the Middle East to declare a provisional government and renew efforts to obtain membership in the OIC which he has repeatedly failed to obtain. Misuari reportedly believes such a declaration is necessary to strengthen his claim that he represents Muslim Filipinos. [REDACTED]

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### Manila's Strategy

President Aquino is continuing Marcos's tactic of negotiating while trying to divide the Muslim factions and co-opt some Moro leaders with government posts. Aquino's earlier efforts—including cease-fire talks with Misuari and a tentative accord based on Manila's interpretation of the Tripoli Agreement—have been stymied by Manila's insistence that a plebiscite determine which areas are to be autonomous; Muslim leaders realize they can count on winning in only five provinces. [REDACTED]

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Aquino also visited Mindanao earlier this year to announce \$100 million in economic development aimed at the Muslim provinces. Subsequent reporting indicates, however, that very little of the money has been spent. In addition, Manila has established a Regional Consultative Commission to recommend legislation, mandated by the 1987 Constitution, to establish an autonomous Muslim region. The commission includes Christians and Muslims, but not representatives of Moro insurgent groups, because they objected to Manila's refusal to base autonomy legislation on the insurgents' strict reading of the Tripoli Agreement. [REDACTED]

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Concerned about reports that Misuari was about to return to the Philippines and launch a new offensive, last month the Philippine military took its most aggressive move in years against the Muslims by stationing four Army battalions to the island of Sulu to reinforce two Philippine Marine battalions. In addition, the Philippine Air Force moved several attack aircraft and helicopters to a nearby airfield. [REDACTED]

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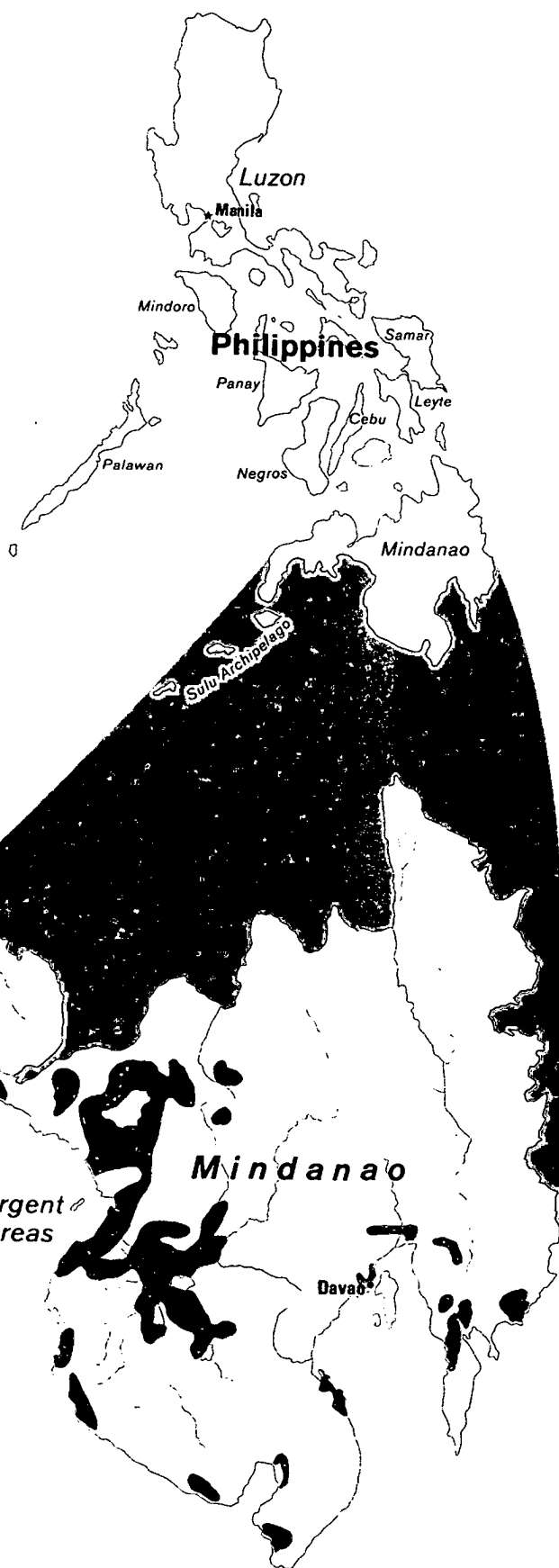
### More Saber-Rattling Likely as Talks Drag On

We believe that saber-rattling and low-level violence by the Moro groups is likely to continue as both Manila and the Muslims pursue negotiations and international diplomatic efforts. In our judgment, the Moro conflict defies an easy or quick solution. Autonomy legislation will probably be unacceptable to the Muslim rebels and unsatisfactory to the Muslim population, because most will feel left out of the development process. At this point, however, the MNLF has few alternatives to negotiating with Manila. Renewed fighting risks the destruction of rebel forces and alienation of moderate supporters in the Middle East. Moreover, most Muslims remember the bloody conflict in the early 1970s in which up to 300,000 Muslims were killed and several hundred thousand fled to Malaysia. If Misuari does not return to the Philippines, however, his forces may dissipate as the Philippine military takes control of his stronghold in Jolo and he risks being left out of any autonomy settlement that could emerge. [REDACTED]

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**EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT**

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ER 88-4149

Executive Secretary

3 NOV 88

Date

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3637 (10-81)

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Executive Secretary

3 NOV 88

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**3637** (10-81)

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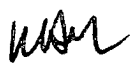
3 November 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: DDI

FROM: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Philippines

1. Could you give me a short memo on Muslim activities in the Philippines. What is the nature of the problem and how has President Aquino dealt with it in the past?

  
William H. Webster

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